

Spain - Extremadura in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

15 - 21 November 2012



Black Redstart



Common Crane



European Otter



Sardinian Warbler

Report compiled by Byron Palacios
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Day 1

Thursday 15th November

England – Madrid – Trujillo (Viña Las Torres)

Weather: Sunny and pleasant

A strike hit some of the most important cities of Spain, reason why our tour was delayed by one day. The party came in two groups: the first group flew from Gatwick and arrived to Madrid near noon, and they were picked up by Julian and set off towards Extremadura. They made a lunch stop in Saucedilla where they saw Cetti's Warbler, Booted Eagles, Cinereous and Griffon Vultures, White Stork, Common Cranes, Eurasian Stonechat, Moorhen, Coot, amongst others. The second group flew from Heathrow and they were picked up by Byron from Terminal 4 and drove up out of Madrid making a stop in one of the service station along the motorway. We saw a few birds along the journey such as Red Kite, Common Crane, Common Kestrel, Buzzard, Spotless Starlings, amongst others. Both groups arrived at the same time to our hotel Viña Las Torres located just in the southern outskirts of Trujillo. We finally gathered all together and meet up before dinner to have a welcome drink – courtesy of our hosts Juan Pedro and Belen – followed by a lovely supper!

Day 2

Friday 16th November

Santa Marta de Magasca (river Magasca) – Belen plains

Weather: Sunny and mild, clouding over later

A bright and sunny morning greeted us on our first full day in Extremadura, so after breakfast we headed west in order to spend the day out in the plains. We made a quick 'bread stop' in Trujillo and immediately hit the road to Caceres, diverting onto a farm road in the area known as Santa Marta de Magasca where we made our very first stop, getting birds such as Wood Lark, Crested Lark, White Wagtail, Spanish Sparrow, Meadow Pipit, Corn Bunting, Eurasian Stonechat and a hungry Sparrowhawk. He was actually after a large flock of Spanish Sparrows and some Corn Buntings got in the raptor's breakfast menu too, flushing them up all over the dehesa area.

One of the opposite fields was carpeted with wintering Northern Lapwings, together with some European Golden Plover, plus some Skylarks which are always good to see, especially when they're in the open! As we hit 'bustard country', we soon started to scan the fields in search for this enigmatic and symbolic bird of the plains, but we were not lucky as we kept working hard for them. We took a dirt wide track which slashed through the vast steppe area and it's good to keep scanning around. A very obliging Southern (Iberian) Grey Shrike was spotted nearby, plus plenty of Northern Lapwings, Skylarks, Meadow Pipits, Crested Larks, Corn Buntings and a bunch of Griffon Vultures in the distance, seemly trying to grab a good thermal to gain some altitude. The plains were windy and this did certainly not help our search, so we got in our vans after our walk and continued down the valley and making a quick stop near the narrow tarmac road. Our first van stopped to check a good group of Azure-winged (Iberian) Magpies when we suddenly spotted a Eurasian Hoopoe amongst them. We gently jumped off our vehicles and get a good position in order to get great views of this lovely bird! We also saw more Iberian Magpies, Mistle Thrush, Chaffinch, Meadow Pipits and the always-lovely European Robin.

We continued towards the village of Santa Marta de Magasca itself where we found a very nice local cafe for us to take a coffee break. After this, we followed the road down to the River Magasca where European Kingfishers were flying along the river constantly while European Terrapins were basking in the sun by the river. A very obvious Sardinian Warbler showed itself very well on the banks, not so the several Hawfinch flying over our heads, they were a bit elusive this time. As the area was nice – so was the weather – we decided to set up our picnic lunch right here. Another group of Griffon Vultures and a single Common Buzzard were soaring above our heads, so were a few Crag Martins which we enjoy watching. We checked both ends of the river from the road hoping to bump across a group of European Otters but we weren't that lucky today.

We then continued our loop on the road across the rugged cork and holm oaks hills and heading back to the plains; two massive black birds made us stop at a sudden, they were two Cinereous (Black) Vultures sat on two rocks and amongst the local cattle. We managed to take quick good views of these two nice birds until they took off and headed down the gully. We kept driving and made a few stops to check the fields which were mainly dominated by Northern Lapwings; and with them, Corn Buntings, Linnets, Goldfinch and good large groups of Calandra Larks. Many Red Kites were seen around the area since the early morning.

The sky was getting a bit covered by clouds and some dark ones were soon covering the horizon in the distance, but they afternoon still look promising and dry. This was reason enough to move to another nice steppes spot known as Belen. It was fairly slow in terms of bird activity and we were wondering where those bustards and sandgrouse could have been...but nothing turned up. Another pair of Eurasian Hoopoe was seen, plus more Goldfinch, Crested and Calandra Larks, Corn Bunting and hundreds of Lapwings seemed to be the only birdlife ahead; but we went onto the tractor roads in order to keep with our search, finding a nice pair of Thekla Lark by the boulder and scrub area. As the target birds today went quiet, we carried on towards our hotel in order to take a break and get ready to gather together again, check the list of the day and to enjoy another delicious dinner!

Day 3

Saturday 17th November

Campo Lugar plains – Vegas del Guadiana (rice fields) – Sierra Brava dam

Weather: Overcast with sunny spells and light showers in the afternoon

We started at the usual time this morning, moving away from the dark clouds above our hotel area. We drove south towards a different steppe area known as Campo Lugar; after twenty minutes of driving we arrived to the site, scanning the green meadows and fields. There were large flocks of birds were crossing around (including a very fast Iberian Hare), being Northern Lapwings the more noticeable and numerous, especially in the distance, while Corn Buntings, Calandra Larks and Goldfinch were flitting from the fields. The sun was shining and we made our first stop by the farm road after having spotted a group of ten Great Bustards which moved over the hill, we then managed to see five of them meandering around, but the majority of them were over the horizon. Scanning the left side of the same field, a dozen Little Bustards were spotted and put in the scopes. Two Calandra Larks were seen very well through the scope as well. A bit later, we spotted another group of over fifty Little Bustards flying across the road, and landing in one of the adjacent fields where we saw them all very well. Eventually, groups of Common Cranes were spotted nearby and a few groups flew right above us. As we were leaving the area of Campo Lugar, a Little Owl was found basking in the morning sun on top of some rock, and a Eurasian Kestrel was also seen on top of some rocks further down the road.

We re-joined the main road and continued to Las Vegas del Guadiana, an area surrounded by dehesas (cork oak meadows) and rice fields, but we had to make another good stop as we spotted a large group of Common Cranes not far from the road. The birds were amongst the dehesa and very visible, and we certainly had great views of hundreds of them, plus many hundreds were flying around the area at the same time, willing to find a good landing spot within the dehesa and amongst the oaks; we jumped off quickly from the vehicles in order to get great views of these lovely birds! We continued to the rice fields where we took a nice walk along the dirt tracks, spotting Cattle Egrets, more Common Cranes, Marsh Harrier, Corn Bunting, Hen Harrier, Grey Heron, Red Avadavat, Eurasian Hoopoe, Spanish Sparrow, a very unusual Glossy Ibis amongst some Cattle Egrets, and White Stork, amongst others. A dark cloud was bringing down some scattered rain, but nothing to be worried about; and although we had a good shower for two minutes during lunch, we managed to finish our picnic quite dry! The group had good views of Red Avadavat and a large group (50 plus) of Stone Curlew, which we all went to see again after lunch.

The rain however was coming and tried to get away from it by heading to brighter areas but it was impossible. We checked one side of the Sierra Brava Dam where we found some Gadwall, Eurasian Coot and Great-crested Grebe. We drove back to the plains at Campo Lugar looking for more bustards but the rain was a big deal as we arrived there. Just a few birds such as Northern Lapwing, Raven, Corn Bunting and Crested Lark were seen along the narrow track. We then decided to take a coffee break and we did so in one of the small bars in the village of Alcollarín. As the rain stopped, we went to check the northern side of the Sierra Brava dam where Common Buzzard, Red Kite and Eurasian Hoopoe were spotted. The highlight here was the very elusive and local Iberian Hare – we had amazing views while they were playing along the lush green dehesa! Two flitting Iberian Chiffchaffs were also seen here. The light was a bit limited by the late afternoon, so we decided to head back to our lodge in order to get ready for to do the checklist followed by another delicious dinner!

Day 4

Sunday 18th November

Monfragüe National Park

Weather: Sunny and beautiful!

It was a beautiful morning today and we could see the orange horizon which normally promises a very nice day, and it was!

We drove along the long Roman Trujillo-Plasencia road which takes you through Monfragüe National Park. A large group of Common Cranes was waking up after roosting in the roadside dehesas and were spotted from the vehicles 'on the go'. We finally made our first stop at the point known as Peña Falcon or Salto del Gitano (the Gypsy cliff), an ideal place to see many raptors! Dozens of Griffon Vultures were perched basking in the refreshing morning sun while some Cinereous (Black) Vultures were soaring around us and sometimes even at eye level! The pinnacles were great to see Blue Rock Thrush, Black Redstart, Common Chiffchaff, and a Short-toed Treecreeper acting more like a Wallcreeper as he was feeding along the mossy parts of the rocky cliff. Two Peregrine Falcons were also spotted while perched on the top of one of the bushes, and also an active European Kingfisher by the river.

We continued driving within the park, making a coffee break stop in the village of Villareal de San Carlos. Not far from there, we found a nice picnic spot to set up our lunch, enjoying the surroundings at the same time. More Griffon and Cinereous Vultures were seen here, alongside some Crag Martins, Grey Heron, Great Cormorant and a solitary young female Red Deer. The numerous Iberian (Azure-winged) Magpies were coming really close to the picnic area, perfect for some close-up photos!

We continued to our next stop at a spot known as Portilla del Tietar, an upper part of the river on the other side of the power station which powers the dam. This point is particularly good to see lots of wildlife and its always full of surprises! As soon as we arrived, Griffons and Cinereous Vultures were seen in the blue sky and the pointy rock cliffs, whereas Great Cormorants and Little Egrets jumped along the rocks by the shore. We were amused with them until we found a very elusive European Otter on the other side of the shore; the very bright sunlight made things even harder as it hit the water against the area where we were standing, so we rushed to find a better angle along the road in order to see the moving otter. We had great views of this lovely animal watching it swimming and fishing for nearly an hour! We also spotted a Northern Goshawk soaring with a group of vultures, as well as the endangered Black Stork! A group of Long-tailed Tits, Chiffchaff, Black Redstart, Blue Rock Thrush and Chaffinch were also seen in the site too. As we were walking towards our vehicles to make a move, a pair of the very much wanted Spanish Imperial Eagle turned up, soaring in the sky, and we enjoyed watching them through the scope...what a great spot this was!

On the drive back to our hotel, we made a little diversion and drove up the rocky hill in order to get to Monfragüe Castle. It was a bit frustrating as the place did not look in the best of shape due to some works they're doing on it, and it didn't help when we couldn't find the key species that we were after. Nevertheless, the impressive views from the top and the few interesting birds such as Red-billed Chough, Crag Martins and Griffon Vultures (seen a eye level plus Blue and Great Tits) made the walk worth it. After this, we drove back straight to the location of Madroñera where Belen and Juan Pedro awaited us with another delicious supper!!

Day 5

Monday 19th November

Montanchez – Dehesa de La Bellota – Sta. Marta de Magasca & Monroy plains – Trujillo
Weather: Sunny and dry

We had another lovely and sunny day today. After breakfast, we headed south towards the village of Montanchez, where the ruins of a castle overlook immense and vast valleys. Nowadays, it's a very good birding place; we saw interesting birds from here such as Black Redstart, Sardinian Warbler, Thekla Lark, Alpine Accentor, Spotless Starling, and Blue Rock Thrush, amongst others.

After exploring around the castle, we walked back to check the rocky and bushy area in the rocky foothill of the castle ruins, in order to check a well known territory of Eurasian Eagle Owl. We've had this lovely bird here in the past but not today unfortunately. A coffee break sounded a good plan for us so we walked down to the village and found a nice cafe in the central plaza. After this, we drove up out of Montanchez and drove back north making a brief diversion into the dehesa of La Bellota. We enjoyed a lovely walk in this beautiful and wild environment and as the sun out we decided to set up our picnic lunch here. Good birds were seen such as Woodlark, Black Redstart, Dartford and Sardinian Warblers, Iberian Chiffchaff, and Azure-winged Magpies, amongst others.

After lunch, we drove back to the plains, just over the area of Santa Martha de Magasca. We saw a good number of Great Bustards here and also a few Pin-tailed Sandgrouse just in the horizon of the field. We continued our exploration down to Monroy road searching for another Eurasian Eagle Owl territory but again, this was not our day for that big bird. We checked more plains along the Monroy road, this time a good group of Little Bustards were seen very well, and more birds such as Calandra Lark, Corn Bunting, Meadow Pipit and Red Kites as we were walking down the track. Loud calls from Pin-tailed Sandgrouse were heard very close, and we managed to see glimpses of a flying group in the distance, but we could not see them perched in the area where they were calling from. This was a bit frustrating as they could have been in a dip, completely out of view from where we were as the terrain is very irregular. We gave up in the end and walk back to our vans and drove to Trujillo in order to take a stroll around the town on the way to the hotel, where we enjoyed another fantastic dinner, and the last one for some of us who had to fly back to London Heathrow the following morning.

Day 6

Tuesday 20th November

Heathrow group: Trujillo – Madrid airport.

Gatwick group: Monroy plains and Sierra Brava Dam.

Weather: Sunny and cool

The Heathrow group had an earlier breakfast in order to get in time to Madrid- Barajas airport. We met that morning with the Gatwick group to say goodbye and to wish each other all the best for the future! The Gatwick group continued on their last full day visiting the area of Monroy plains where they got good views this time of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse. They also visited the area of Sierra Brava Dam where more Common Cranes were seen. Our final day of exploring Extremadura was a memorable one, with happy faces all round, and we drove back to our cosy, rural hotel as the sunlight faded, before enjoying a traditional home-cooked meal with local wines and acorn liqueur to finish.

Day 7

Wednesday 21st November

Trujillo – Madrid Barajas airport

Weather: Overcast, windy and wet

On our final morning we enjoyed our last breakfast before loading the vans and saying goodbye to our hosts Juan Pedro and Belen. We arrived at Madrid airport in plenty of time before getting our flight back to the UK where we all said farewell at the baggage carousels before continuing our journeys back home.

Species Lists

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; H = Heard Only)

	Common name	Scientific name	November					
			15	16	17	18	19	20
1	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>				h	✓	
2	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>			✓			
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>					✓	
4	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			✓	✓		
5	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>				✓		
6	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>			✓		✓	
7	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>			✓			
8	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>			✓			
9	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓		
10	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				✓		
11	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
12	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓	✓		✓	
13	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
14	Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>		✓		✓		
15	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			✓			
16	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>			✓		✓	
17	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>						
18	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓				
19	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>				✓		
20	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
21	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>				✓		
22	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
23	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>				✓		
24	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>			✓		✓	
25	Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>			✓		✓	
26	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓			
27	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		✓	✓	✓		
28	Eurasian Stone-Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedichnemus</i>			✓			
29	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
30	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓				
31	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		✓				
32	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓	✓			
33	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>			✓			
34	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			✓			
35	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>					h	
36	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>					✓	
37	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
38	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓		✓	✓	
39	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
40	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>			✓			
41	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		✓	✓	✓		
42	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
43	Southern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓	✓		✓	
44	Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
45	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
46	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>				✓		

	Common name	Scientific name	November					
			15	16	17	18	19	20
47	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>			✓		✓	
48	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓		✓	
49	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓		✓	
50	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓		✓	✓	
51	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>				✓	✓	
52	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		✓	✓		✓	
53	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
54	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		✓			✓	
55	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓			✓	
56	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓			✓	
57	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
58	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			h			
59	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓		
60	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>				✓	✓	✓
61	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>				✓		✓
62	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>				✓		
63	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		✓			✓	
64	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		h				
65	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>		✓			✓	
66	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>				✓		
67	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>					h	
68	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>				✓		
69	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
70	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓		✓	✓	
71	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>					✓	
72	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓		✓	✓	
73	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
74	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
75	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
76	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				✓	✓	
77	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
78	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		✓	✓			
79	Red Avadavat	<i>Amandava amandava</i>			✓			
80	Alpine Accentor	<i>Prunella collaris</i>					✓	
81	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓		✓		
82	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
83	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓		✓	
84	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		✓				
85	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
86	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>					✓	
87	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>					✓	
88	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
89	Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>		✓				
90	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		✓				
91	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓	✓		✓	
92	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>					✓	
93	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>				✓		

	Common name	Scientific name	November					
			15	16	17	18	19	20

Insects

1	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>				✓		
2	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓		✓		
3	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>				✓		
4	Southern Hawker	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>						
5	Ruddy Darter	<i>Sympetrum sanguineum</i>					✓	

Mammals

11	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>					✓	
12	Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>		✓			✓	
13	European Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>				✓		
14	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>				✓		

Reptiles & Amphibians

23	European Pond Terrapin	<i>Emys orbicularis</i>		✓			✓	
24	Western Whip Snake	<i>Coluber viridiflavus</i>				✓		

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